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EXCERPTED

They're Making This A Safer Land

B Y P E T E R M A A S

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N THIS
Saturday
morning
in May, the
activities at
Howard Sa-

fir's place seem no different than what is occurring, to one degree or another, in any of the other ranch houses and neo-Colonial homes in this middle-class development in Virginia, about a half-hour's drive from Washington.

Barefoot, in blue jeans and a polo shirt, Safir listens as a young man, there to spray the trees and shrubbery on his half-acre plot, earnestly explains the advantages in a service contract that will cost an extra \$10. "Fine, OK," Safir says. But the young man is bent on continuing his carefully rehearsed pitch.

"Look, I'm sold. Go ahead," Safir repeats. "We're both wasting time." For Safir, there is no worse crime.

For the marshals, even in their glory years, there had never been a manhunt like this one. Every tip, even from kooks and psychics, was followed up. Marshals went to South Africa, to Mexico, to Central America and scoured the United States looking for Boyce. Finally, after some 18 months, a hot lead had him in the Pacific Northwest. There were reports that Boyce intended to head

by boat for Russia, perhaps had already left. It was a nail-biting time for Safir—really now or never.

Then, one August night in 1981, while he was watching the late news on television, Safir's phone rang. It was one of his marshals in Seattle reporting: "The Falcon is in the cage."

Any lingering doubts about the new role of the marshals was resolved the following June, 1982. For several years, an assistant U.S. attorney in Washington, D.C., E. Lawrence Barcella Jr., had been chasing an even more infamous fugitive, a former CIA agent named Edwin P. Wilson, who had sold himself to the Libyan godfather of worldwide terrorism, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi.

Now Barcella had devised a plan to entice Wilson out of his Libyan sanctuary.

Barcella, though, needed backup. Since Wilson had not been prosecuted, he was a primary FBI target, but the bureau decided that Barcella's "hare-brained scheme" was too risky and declined to participate. Safir jumped right in to help, and when Wilson was successfully returned to the U.S., the marshals could claim another major coup.

In a federal bureaucracy where many

officials tend to look at the downside to protect themselves, Safir is exceptional. As Barcella notes, "Howard has beaten the system with high-visibility success. He doesn't always win, but when he does, he makes sure to win big."

In between the bookends of Boyce and Wilson, the marshals today are pre-eminent in fugitive recovery. Bat Masterson would be amazed. In the last four years, an invention of Safir's called FIST—the Fugitive Investigative Strike Team—has collared more than 11,000 wanted criminals.
